

Police Trained in Use of Naloxone

Police officers are being trained by the Lake County Health Department on how to administer a drug that shuts down an overdose of opioid drugs when an officer arrives on the scene as a first responder. The training is part of a drug overdose prevention program overseen by the Illinois Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (DASA). Lay people and first responders are being trained to use naloxone if they believe a person is experiencing an opioid overdose.

“It will either relieve them or do nothing,” said Bartlett Police Commander Michael McGuigan, who assisted with the training. “The only time we get into trouble at the Bartlett Police Department is when we don’t use it,” he said.

Once the nasal mist is administered, the person should respond in less than two minutes. However, the spray may need to be given again when the person awakens.

Opioids are sedative narcotics that come in various forms such as morphine, codeine, heroin, hydrocodone, oxycodone, fentanyl, methadone and Demerol. Opioid drugs are usually prescribed for pain. Many new opioid drugs are given each year, sometimes through pain clinics.

“People think, ‘how can something a doctor prescribes for you be bad?’” said Susan McKnight, Substance Abuse Program Coordinator at the Health Department. She added that about 50 percent of the prescription drugs people get come from friends or relatives.

While most police across the country are not trained to administer Naloxone, Lake County health and law enforcement officials have been working for two years to provide the training for police officers who are often the first to arrive.

The number of substance abuse deaths caused by opioids increased from 50 percent in 2008 to 80 percent today, McKnight said. Heroin is 10 times more powerful today than it was in the 1960s and 1970s and most people coming to the Health Department for drug abuse treatment have been using heroin, she said. In the U.S. 34,000 youths, ages 12 to 17 initiate the use of heroin each year.

Heroin use makes the user feel good, she added. But when the person comes down, the feeling drops below the normal state of feeling good, so the user wants to try it again to get the same level of high reached the first time heroin was used. However, the user can never reach that first-time level.